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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Research Administration  
Bureau of Animal Industry

X ENFORCEMENT OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE QUARANTINE ON THE  
UNITED STATES-MEXICAN BORDER

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The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico late in 1946, together with the continued presence of the disease there, has directed much public attention to the international border as a possible route by which that devastating live-stock plague might invade the United States. In periodic reports on developments in the campaign in Mexico frequent references to the protective measures being taken at the international border have been included. Continued public interest in the subject has suggested this more comprehensive statement on the character of the quarantine and its enforcement.

Authority for the Quarantine

The present quarantine on the international border is based on Federal legislation that applies also to quarantine measures in effect at seaboard ports with respect to animals and various products from countries where foot-and-mouth disease exists. The Tariff Act of 1930 includes a prohibition against the importation into the United States of cattle, sheep, other domestic ruminants and swine, and of fresh, chilled, or frozen beef, veal, mutton, lamb or pork from countries where foot-and-mouth disease or rinderpest exists, as determined and announced by the Secretary of Agriculture.

In accordance with the mandate of the Tariff Act, the Secretary of Agriculture imposed the quarantine on importations of specified animals and products from Mexico promptly after the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in that country.

Prohibited and Admissible Animals and Products

Federal animal quarantine legislation enacted as early as 1890 authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to make rules and regulations for quarantine enforcement, with the view to excluding dangerous livestock infections from the United States. The authority thus given enabled the Secretary to prescribe terms and conditions under which animals and products may be refused entry, permitted entry subject to restrictions, or destroyed if entered illegally into the United States. Those conditions are set forth concisely in the Department's regulations designated as B.A.I. Orders 371 and 373. The importation of organs, glands, extracts, or secretions of ruminants or swine is permitted for pharmaceutical purposes under restrictions which safeguard this country from exposure to any possible virus. Cattle, sheep, other domestic ruminants and swine, and fresh, chilled, or frozen beef, pork, mutton and lamb are prohibited entry from a country in which foot-and-mouth disease or rinderpest is known to exist. Fresh, chilled, or frozen meat or meat product derived from wild ruminants or wild swine originating in such countries is not allowed entry into the United States. Garbage derived from meats or meat products originating in any country in which foot-and-mouth disease or rinderpest is known to exist may not be unloaded from any vessel in the United States or within the territorial waters thereof, except for proper disposal under official supervision. Cured meats are excluded unless prepared in a specified manner which destroys any virus present. An amendment to B.A.I. Order 373, promulgated July 25, 1947, made special provision for the prompt destruction or





other immediate safe disposition of prohibited animals or products coming into the country in an irregular manner, as by straying across land borders or by smuggling.

The Department's regulations are based on the modern knowledge of veterinary science and are necessarily within the authority of the basic legislation. For many years Bureau of Animal Industry officials, who advise the Secretary of Agriculture on such matters, have sought, when drafting veterinary restrictions for a specified purpose, to keep them from being unreasonable, or from needlessly restricting legitimate business and commerce. For instance, the regulations permit the entry of fresh, chilled, or frozen glands for pharmaceutical purposes and of green salted hides and skins when shipped under seal to an establishment approved by the Bureau for the proper sanitary handling of the product. Among the products which are admitted without other restrictions are clean hair and wool, as well as clean dry bones, horns, hoofs, and hard-dried hides and skins. No case of foot-and-mouth disease has ever been traced to the importation of those by-products.

The regulations do not prohibit the entry of horses into the United States, but when such animals come from an area where infection is present or suspected, the Department's inspectors require the thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the legs and feet of the horses, together with all buckets, curry combs, blankets, and other gear that accompanied them. Disinfection extends also to the immediate premises where the horses are held when inspected.

Conditions sometimes arise in which popular sentiment seems to urge measures that far exceed the requirements of safety and sound judgment. Even though public opinion might temporarily support unreasonable requirements, Bureau officials believe that the public would soon lose faith in an organization that sponsored regulations having no scientific or other sound justification.

#### Nature of Border Patrol

In January 1947, soon after foot-and-mouth disease appeared in Mexico, the Department took measures to strengthen and tighten the border defenses. Surveys by experienced quarantine officers led to an augmented border patrol. This force patrols the border in two shifts of 7 hours each, 7 days a week. At critical points 24-hour, or around-the-clock, supervision is provided. The personnel now on duty has been very carefully selected with special reference to dependability, resourcefulness, good judgment, knowledge of livestock, and horsemanship. Some of the men on the force were formerly in the employ of border States on similar duties, or were men with experience as customs or local law enforcement agents. Most of the range riders and supervisory inspectors are intimately familiar with the type of country to which they are assigned, including the habits and customs of the people. Many of the men on the force speak both English and Spanish. The range riders use horses and jeeps to patrol their assigned territory. The foremen use chiefly cars or jeeps but many must also have horse trailers attached to their motor vehicles so that they can cover more mileage in level areas and yet have a horse when necessary to travel in rough terrain. As a still further aid in maintaining the patrol, reconnaissance by airplane has proved valuable and is in constant use.





The border patrol is directed by a supervising inspector and district inspectors in charge, all of whom are experienced in quarantine work relating to foot-and-mouth disease.

Camps are located at strategic points along the boundary to accommodate the employees that patrol the various sectors. Part of the boundary trail is mountainous and rocky; other parts are through sandy desert. At several of the camps it is necessary to transport water for the employees and their horses over distances up to 38 miles.

#### Cooperation of Other Enforcement Agencies

Employees of the Bureau of Customs, and The Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine at designated ports of entry are familiar with the requirements of the Bureau of Animal Industry. As a result of their cooperation in carrying out these requirements it has been necessary for Bureau of Animal Industry representatives to make only check inspections at such ports of entry. However, at a limited number of recognized ports of entry, Bureau representatives aid in the inspection of vehicular traffic entering the United States, and also the baggage of tourists, immigrants, and others who may have prohibited meat, animal by-products, hay or straw, or other materials which might introduce the virus of foot-and-mouth disease into this country. In order to extend further the cooperation between the Government agencies operating along the Mexican border, and to increase the efficiency of the Bureau's foot-and-mouth disease border patrol, arrangements were made with Bureau of Customs for that agency to deputize certain key Bureau personnel as customs agents. This action increased the authority of the selected Bureau officers in that they now have broader powers to make arrests, as well as to seize and destroy prohibited animals and products entering illegally from Mexico.

The number of animals, including cattle, sheep, swine, and goats found to enter the United States illegally, since the establishment of the present patrol, has ranged between about 10 to 230 monthly. The number of prohibited animals that it is necessary to destroy because of illegal entry varies from month to month in proportion to the amount of rainfall in northern Mexico and the care exercised by owners in preventing straying across the border. When drought conditions exist in that area, more animals than usual seek water near the border and continue on across to graze. The destruction of these animals has brought about the private building of approximately 100 miles of fencing on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River. Some smuggling has been detected and the animals and meat seized and destroyed. Animals that enter illegally are killed and their carcasses buried or burned in accordance with the regulations.

#### Use of Airplanes on Patrol

Aerial surveys of activities on the border have been helpful in enforcing the quarantine. Observations of unusual movements or collections of livestock on the Mexican side, or other conditions which appear to bear close checking, are reported to the ground forces. The camps of the range riders are distinctively marked. Information in the form of written messages is dropped from the plane in specially constructed cloth bags.

The impartiality of quarantine enforcement merits comment. Under the law, the Department's enforcement officers are required to destroy designated kinds of animals that enter the United States from a country where foot-and-mouth disease





exists. So if a cow, for instance, wanders from the United States across the international border and later returns to the United States, that animal, having been in Mexico, must be destroyed. It has the same status, under the law, as a cow raised in Mexico, if it enters the United States.

In the course of quarantine enforcement along the border, numerous incidents, in addition to livestock inspection, show the need for continued watchfulness. For instance, the baggage of persons entering the United States has been found to contain fresh meat and even bloody spears used in bull-fights in Mexico.

#### Fencing

Especially along border areas where large numbers of cattle graze on open range there has been urgent need for more fencing to help prevent the straying of animals from Mexico into the United States. Through the cooperation of the International Boundary and Water Commission and the National Park Service with the Bureau of Animal Industry, some additional fencing has been constructed to prevent drifting of livestock.

#### Prompt Reporting Important

As a final comment on the border quarantine situation, there is always the possibility that in spite of every precaution, some infective virus may gain access to the United States by land, sea, or air at some point along its extensive land and water boundaries. Department officials are confident that, though highly infective, foot-and-mouth disease can be quickly eradicated if detected promptly. Abundant evidence supports this view. The public can be of great help in protecting the country against this disease by reporting any suspected sign of it at once to the nearest county, State, or Federal veterinarian or livestock sanitary official by the quickest means of communication.

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